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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ICRC](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEKS AND ICRC REACH AGREEMENT ON RESTARTING  
PRISON VISITS

REF: A. TASHKENT 223  
[1](#)B. 07 TASHKENT 2163  
[1](#)C. 07 TASHKENT 2150  
[1](#)D. 07 TASHKENT 2066  
[1](#)E. 07 TASHKENT 2006  
[1](#)F. 07 TASHKENT 1895

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for  
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On February 26 the Ambassador met with Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Alisher Sharafutdinov who, in the course of discussions on the human rights situation (septel), stated that the Government of Uzbekistan has reached an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on resuming prison visits. Sharafutdinov showed a copy of an official diplomatic note informing the ICRC of the decision, with prison visits to start on March 15. ICRC Deputy Head of the Regional Delegation in Central Asia Raffaello Muller confirmed this in a subsequent conversation with poloff. Muller said "the agreement is very good," but said initially prison visits will restart "on a trial basis" to ensure that the serious dialogue the ICRC has long insisted on actually takes place. Muller believes upcoming important decisions in Brussels and Washington about possible sanctions against Uzbekistan "were a motivation" in reaching a deal. The resumption of ICRC visits was one of the major "menu items" we put forth to the Government of Uzbekistan of tangible steps forward on human rights, and the end of the impasse with the ICRC is an encouraging development. Of course, there have been prison visits without satisfactory results before, so we will carefully watch to make sure the Uzbeks deliver on their agreements with the ICRC. The Uzbeks have also released some political prisoners, unblocked USAID-supported websites (but not Democracy Commission grantees' sites), and made progress in registering some NGOs. Together, these measures reflect a conscious effort by the Government of Uzbekistan to demonstrate progress on human rights. End summary.

The Impasse is Broken

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¶12. (C) On February 26 the Ambassador met with Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Sharafutdinov to discuss the status of human rights and legal reform issues in Uzbekistan in advance of a high-profile conference in Tashkent next week co-sponsored by the USAID-funded NGO Open Dialogue and the Uzbek Government's Foundation for Regional Policy (see septel). Sharafutdinov stated that, as a result of recent negotiations, the Government of Uzbekistan reached a deal with the ICRC to resume prison visits on March 15. He showed the Ambassador official diplomatic correspondence about the agreement, which breaks a long stalemate (reftel A). The Government of Uzbekistan has previously invited the ICRC to resume visits at any time (reftels), but the ICRC was adamant about ensuring a serious dialogue about its previous findings.

#### ICRC Confirms the Deal

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¶13. (C) In a subsequent conversation with poloff on February 26, Muller confirmed that an agreement had indeed been reached. He stressed that the prison visits will begin "on a trial basis" to ensure that the serious dialogue that ICRC has long insisted upon actually takes place. Muller reminded us that ICRC has suspended its prison visits a few times already in the past, but he feels "this agreement is very good." While he would not go into details about the specific discussions, Muller assured poloff that "if we are going to restart it will be on a solid base." He also added that the agreement will cover not only facilities under the administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), but it will include "access to all persons incarcerated in

Uzbekistan, including by the National Security Service (NSS)."

#### What Confidentiality?

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¶14. (C) Due to confidentiality concerns, the ICRC did not plan to announce the agreement until visits had actually resumed in mid-March. Muller was surprised that the Government of Uzbekistan promptly shared the information and the diplomatic note with the Ambassador. He noted the irony that the Government of Uzbekistan previously complained about ICRC allegedly violating the confidentiality agreement by making prison visit information public. Muller believes that upcoming decisions in Brussels and Washington about possible sanctions against Uzbekistan "were a motivating factor," and added "they are really selling the skin of the bear before the hunt."

#### It's Starting to Add Up

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¶15. (C) Word of a breakthrough on resuming ICRC prison visits follows a string of other recent positive steps forward. The websites of USAID-supported entities are all unblocked (although some Embassy Democracy Commission grantees' websites remain blocked); some (but by no means all) political prisoners in whom we are interested have been released; and there has been progress in registering NGOs, specifically the German-based Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Human Rights Watch has also resumed operations in the country and its Director's accreditation is pending. The USAID-supported Open Dialogue Project, which is one of the sponsors of the upcoming major conference on human rights and law enforcement, is also now confident it can obtain registration.

#### Comment

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¶16. (C) Uzbekistan has now made some significant steps forward on human rights in response to direct challenges to deliver tangible results. It has taken action on several of the "menu items" we put forth to the Government to demonstrate

its commitment (reftel B). However, as always, the proof will be in the pudding, and ICRC reminds us that there have been unsatisfactory prison visits in the past. We welcome this encouraging news but will carefully monitor the program to ensure that the Uzbeks deliver on their commitments to take the ICRC's work seriously.

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